

North House presentation ... Faithworks Sunday ... November 21, 2021

Good morning. My name is Ron Houston and I am the Chair of the North House Board of Directors. For those of you that don't know us, North House is a not-for-profit organization, founded in 2004, that provides a spectrum of housing supports for those who are at risk or in crisis within the communities of North Durham. Our office is located in Uxbridge, and our Outreach workers travel throughout all three North Durham townships of Scugog, Brock and Uxbridge.

Homelessness is on the rise in North Durham. Most of those who are homeless in our communities do not live on the streets, covered in sleeping bags; they're your friend's adult child who moved home with their own children, due to the high costs of rent. It's the retired parents who now live in their child's basement because they can no longer afford their own home, or the cousin who sleeps on your couch while searching for an affordable apartment. Whatever the reason, North House is always there to help.

I wanted to share some statistics year over year to illustrate some trends going on in North Durham which are similar across Ontario. Our caseload has more than doubled in the past year. The need for services during Covid have increased dramatically year over year. People have lost their jobs, addiction is a rising concern and struggles with mental health have increased.

I'd like to tell you about June. She is a 46-year-old mother of a beautiful 12-year-old son. June's life was once busy with running her own business and she enjoyed teaching yoga on the side, while creating a home for her husband and son. In a blink of an eye, it seemed that her life was crumbling down around her. The business she created was now forced to close, her marriage fell apart and her son was growing with more needs daily. June felt isolated... Alone.

Now as a single parent, her bills piled up, her rent was due, and her son was hungry. They were at risk of losing their home. With things spiraling out of control, June lost hope... June lost the will to live... June lost her faith...

For months, June struggled to find a reason to live. Each day was, in her mind, going to be her last. One morning she woke with a small spark of hope. She wasn't sure why because she hadn't felt this way in months. Was it her will to survive, the courage to find a solution for her son, or perhaps something else? She wasn't sure, but that day was the day she called North House.

With many tears, June spoke to us about her life, her struggles and her son. She wanted to feel better. To be happy. For her son to be happy. We knew the road ahead would be tough and so did she. However, at that moment, what we knew that she didn't was that there was hope for her and her son to live a better life.

Over the next month, we connected June to support services who could help with her depression. We facilitated discussions with social services to obtain funds for her each month until she is well enough to work again. In addition, we are providing a subsidy for her rent, which makes her very limited income go a little bit further each month.

Today June is thriving. She has returned to teaching yoga. She hosts a podcast on depression in the hope of helping others. When June comes to visit and check in with us, she speaks about her faith in her community and those around her. For the first time in a long time, she is hopeful.

Today, she is loving life, one day at a time, watching her son grow.

Although June's story has a happy ending, not all do. We recently met David, a 53-year-old man who has been living on the streets for two years. Before the streets, he was incarcerated. He was released with no money, no family, no friends... nothing. He ate through the donations of people by sitting outside fast food restaurants and he slept in the lobby throughout the night of local banks to escape the bitter cold in the winter. He walked from

Uxbridge to Port Perry to see his parole officer once a month, at which time, he would jump in the lake for a bath. For those of you who do not know, the distance between Port Perry and Uxbridge is 15.6 kilometres and takes 3 hours and 15 minutes to walk it – one way.

We met David through a concerned community member who had stopped one day to talk to him – to ask him how he was doing. They became friends, in a way. He then brought David to our office to see how or if we could help. It was clear that David was suffering from mental health issues, but he was doing his best to stay positive. He told us that he never lost hope that someone would help him. He told us how he had been to several different places over the past two years seeking help and that he had not been able to find it. Being in jail makes it hard to get a job. With no job, he couldn't get a place to live. With no place to live, he couldn't get the mental health supports he needs. David confessed that he couldn't make it through another winter on the street. We were able to get David a much-needed shower and a new set of clothes. A post on Facebook for donations of clothes was very successful! The strength and faith in our small community is overwhelming and second-to-none.

While we searched for a place for him to live, we supplied him with a knapsack to keep his things, a wallet to keep the food cards we gave him to buy food, and a place to come whenever he needed someone.

Within a few days we had arranged a meeting between David and a potential new landlord who was willing to rent a room in their home to him along with a subsidy to help pay his monthly rent. The meeting went well and the landlord told him “the room was his if he wanted it”.

This is where the story takes a turn. Although we did everything we could to assist David in getting off the streets, he made the choice to not take the room. In fact, he doesn't come by the office to check in any more. Our staff see him on the street, so we know he is around.

Not everybody is ready to accept change, even when it could mean changing their life in a more positive way. He has made a choice to remain on the streets and we will continue to support him in whatever way we can for as long as he needs us.

In our world we often judge success in terms of wealth and self-reliance but In God's Kingdom there is a different set of metrics that we will be judged by - as I have read in the scriptures - many who are first will be last and the last first. The Christian faith invites us to let go of our own self-reliance and to recognize that we need a community to support and uplift us. We need to remember that none of us walks alone. As part of our (*or the*) faith we are invited to reach out to others in love and compassion and to share our gifts with those in need, so that everyone will be able to have their basic needs met, and feel dignity and pride. As we know, not everyone will accept that invitation, but at North House, there is a culture of understanding and strength for those we serve. We provide strength when they can't find it themselves to help discover solutions to their problems. Our culture helps us change lives in a positive, permanent way and sometimes it just allows us to support people the way they need it in that moment.

We really appreciate the partnership that we have with St. Paul's. The work on the Poverty Coalition and the recent formation of a hub in Uxbridge are helping those in need in the community.

I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about North House and the important work we do in our community every day. I hope you will keep June, David and North House in your prayers.

Thank you.